

# Launceston Flood Research Initiative

*Flood risk in Launceston: Understanding community perceptions and policy responses*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research grows out of concern for the potentially significant economic and social outcomes of a modest or major flood event in Launceston. While the implications of such an event would resonate throughout the greater Launceston municipality, they would be most directly experienced in the suburbs of Invermay and Inveresk (referred to throughout the report as Invermay). Much of this area is low lying and much is protected from flood damage by a system of levees. Recently, engineering advice has indicated that the levee system has been subject to significant degradation over time, and there is concern that it could not currently deliver the functionality required to protect Invermay against flood (GHD and Risk Frontiers, 2006). In response, plans are now underway to strengthen the system and implement other, additional protective measures. However, in light of the estimated time frame for the strengthening of the levees (up to 5 years), and given that levee systems are only a partial response to flood risk, there is a need to investigate the factors that may impact upon response and recovery in the event of a major flood. In particular, there is a need to understand how residents perceive the likelihood and nature of flood, how they have engaged with the flood risk information provided to them, and the strategies they plan to implement in a flood event.

Developing our knowledge of community responses to flood risk can contribute to more robust and effective strategies of communication and flood risk management. Launceston City Council has distributed information about flood risk and appropriate responses through a number of media, but to date, residents' responses to this communication have not been canvassed. And yet, existing risk communication literature indicates that risk communication is most effective when a two way transfer of information occurs, so that lay knowledge (consisting of social, historical and personal understandings of flood) is related to expert technical information about calculable risks and effective response. In short, effective policies must in part be based on an understanding of how people themselves perceive and respond to any particular phenomenon.

### 1.1 Objectives

In contributing to a more holistic understanding of flood risk in the Invermay area, the project was guided by the following objectives:

- Undertake a current detailed demographic analysis of potential flood-affected areas.
- Gain an understanding regarding people's perceptions of flood risk.
- Assess how prepared people are for a major flood event in Launceston.
- Identify the key social issues that may pose challenges for response and recovery in the event of a major flood event, particularly in regard to evacuation.
- Identify key groups and stakeholders that are involved in associated policy decisions.
- Outline relevant government policies that address flood risk and recovery.